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ABSTRACT

One of the results of rural school district consolidation has been the potential for schisms that develop among the divergent populations with distinct traditions, culture, and customs. This paper presents research on an Appalachian school district that remains in cultural turmoil after 25 years of consolidation. The population of the three districts in the consolidation consists of university professors, a commune, welfare recipients, a small contingent of gay families, far-right activists, and a typically rural population. Problems and conflicts include location of schools, school board membership, opposition to or support of the high school principal, relaxation of school atmosphere, changes to block scheduling and team teaching, unhappiness among non-college-prep students, and lower achievement scores. The present study included interviews with the superintendent and principals; focus groups with teachers, students, and parents; a telephone survey of 360 district residents; and statistical and achievement test data from the state department of education and school district. Interview findings show principals working to improve communications with the community. Statistical data analysis shows positive economic growth, little increase in enrollment, an increased dropout rate, static attendance, an overall upward trend in proficiency test scores except for grade 4, and a drop in college-entrance scores. A table shows comparative data for the study district and 10 similar districts. Focus-group key points are given only for the parents of high school students. The district-wide 24-question survey of residents shows areas of deep division related to the consolidation; eight graphs show agreement/disagreement in specific areas. Conclusions discuss the challenges to this artificially created community and offer suggestions for working toward positive community goals of trust, understanding, and increased school funding. The school performance survey and focus group questions are included. (SAS)

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Rural Districts in Crisis: When a Community is Divided

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Introduction

One of the results of rural district consolidation has been the potential for schisms that develop among the divergent populations brought together. In rural regions, local communities often have distinct traditions, culture, and customs that differ from neighboring communities. With consolidation, these differences can turn into cultural battles through the schools. The learning environment may be at risk when the patchwork community argues about who sits on the school board, who is hired as a teacher or principal, or which curriculum or teaching methods is used. Peshkin (1982) studied the effects of school consolidation in the rural environment and found that the loss of control over their children's education and the ill effects of perceived winner gloating made the consolidation less than perfect. This less than perfect union extended to the teachers and impacted the abilities of administrators to improve the learning environment.

Page and Clelland (1978) found in a textbook controversy case that a clash existed between people based on "cultural fundamentalism" and "cultural modernism". The findings indicated that two distinct communities existed in the district and they held "two distinct constellations of values about schools and textbooks as means of socializing the young" (p. 443). Page and Clelland refer to this conflict as "politics of life style concern".

What is overall goal of rural communities for their schools? Howley and Eckman (1997) state that "the school is heavily influenced by the community. The human resources and the values of the community affect the schools' educational aspirations and abilities (p. 6). Further Howley and Eckman conclude that

> "Everyone has a stake in a community's schools. Parents want their children to be well prepared for life. Community members want young people to grow into responsible neighbors capable of contributing to the community. Educators want to share knowledge and do it well" (p.3)

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> "Everyone has a rightful place in making decisions about schooling and education.. Schools and communities are part of one another; they should be seen as such…This means that the more schools and communities recognize, celebrate, and develop their inherent connection, the better off they will be" (p.3).

Another interesting point made by Howley and Eckman is that isolation is often present in the community. "Some parents may feel alienated and unwelcome at the school, especially if the are uncomfortable around college-educated teachers" (p. 6).

Theoretical Perspective

Theoretically, the present study examines what Tonnies describes as a gesellschaft community. "They [the people] are essentially separated in spite of all uniting factors". Tonnies describes a gemeinschaft community as "they [the people] remain essentially united in spite of all separating factors" (p. 65). "One group is independent of the other group, and values held by one group are often different from, and even in conflict with, values held by the other group" Tonnies argued that communities in general were moving from gemeinschaft to gesellschaft during the 20th century. (Lutz & Merz, 1992, p. 43).

What happens when an artificial community is established? There may be little common ground. The community begins as gesellschaft and may never have an opportunity to develop any other way, so the schism is part of the beginning of the community. How long can the situation endure or is it possible to change the situation? The examination of a rural district that consolidated into a gesellschaft community offers an opportunity to explore theory as it pertains to artificially created communities rather than naturally developing communities.

Background

The district that is the focus of the present research remains in cultural turmoil after more than 25 years of consolidation. Three districts were consolidated to form the "Gesell Local School District". These districts are seated in the heart of an Appalachian rural section of a Mid-

American state. Financial need caused the consolidation effort over the strenuous objections of at least one of the previous districts. These communities form a banana shaped district. On one end of the banana is a moderately liberal village with university professors, a commune, some 60s hippies, a small contingent of gay families, and what might be considered a typical rural population. At the other end of the banana is a very conservative village surrounded by people many of whom are members of either a KKK contingent, a militia, or other far right organizations as well as a typical rural population. The previous middle district contains a population with a combination of the other two districts' populations and more moderate members.

In the beginning

After the initial conflict over consolidation, the two end communities argued over the placement of schools. Finally it was decided to have an elementary school at each end of the district and the middle and high school in the middle community. Existing buildings were used at first and recently a new middle and renovated high school have been completed at the same site. The elementary schools are decades old and the facilities need major renovations or replacement but financial constraints have not allowed these actions.

From the beginning, the more conservative end of the district has viewed the district power base to be in the liberal end of the district. The conservatives believed that the liberals controlled the School Board and that conservative family children were slighted in an educational sense because of movement toward reform. Also the conservative end of the district is the poorest and as a group defeated the levies and bonds issues brought to the voters.

Recent Conflicts

Most recently, a conflict arose with a change in the school board membership. Two intensely conservative people were brought into office from the conservative end of the district. The board consists of five members and along with an already existing conservative a power triad was formed that attempted to remove the most progressive administrator in the district, the high school principal.

This principal arrived five years previously and completed several projects of educational reform including discipline/behavior rules, curriculum, scheduling changed to blocks, team teaching, and a more rule relaxed atmosphere in the building. For example, students may eat, drink, and chew gum in classes if teachers permit it. The soft drink machine is open during the day and students, with a pass, may get drinks. Many parents were dismayed to hear of such behavior that to them seemed inappropriate in school.

Academically some teachers had difficulties adjusting to block scheduling and some long time teachers left the school. This was perceived as the "principal driving them away" by some members of the community. During this time of change, more students moved to the vocational school than previous administrations had seen. At the same time many of the non-college prep courses, such as business, were discontinued. Some members of the community viewed this action as being elitist and discouraging to non-college prep students. This was the cause of much discussion and enormous anger in some quarters.

Further, this principal was viewed as an outsider, a liberal intellectual, and lives in liberal end of the district. He also had ties to the local university. The incorporation of new ideas for teaching, discipline, and school governance confused more tradition community members. The democratization of the school alarmed and even frightened some of the most conservative members of the district.

Petitions to remove or keep the principal were circulated across the district. The local newspapers became embroiled in overstatements that further confused issues. Board meetings became open town meetings with various constituents making passionate statements of support or criticism. These groups included the KKK, militia members, parents, students, and former students. The principal had become the most recent polarization of community tensions.

The board did vote to "non-renew" without a public explanation. Students walked out of the high school in protest, parents and supportive community members wrote letters of support. Former teachers wrote letters of criticism. In the end, the legal issues resolved the matter and the

principal remains in his position for a few more years because the board did not follow proper due process.

At present tensions have moved underground but just below the surface. Students, who are not college prep, still report unhappiness with the principal; claiming that he ignores them and favors the "smart kids" only. Parents in the conservative end of the district are still unhappy but have lost the school board members they elected in a hotly contested race this fall.

The principal has a vision of a democratically managed school with emphasis on quality teaching and learning. He also believes in each child's ability to learn and each teacher's ability to remain up to date on teaching methods. At the present time, he is working to communicate better with district members and explain his vision. Activities have been planned to enhance contact with community members such as a retreat and family nights at the school. It will be a difficult task but he seems determined to improve the situation for all.

Future Possible Conflicts

Proficiency scores have dropped dramatically in the 4th grade and both sides of the district will assess blame. Fault will probably be laid at new teaching methods and attempts will be made to force a return to "traditional teaching methods". Also the high school situation will continue to be addressed in the press and through the local grapevine. The newest claim is that the principal is charging some students to park at the high school [not true].

Methodology

Case studies (a) examine a range of complex social phenomena, (b) are process oriented, and (c) represent a holistic approach to research (Yin, 1989. Patton (1990) stated that "qualitative data can put flesh on the bones of survey results" (p. 132). Further, Patton states that "case studies are particularly valuable when the evaluation aims to capture...unique variations from one program setting to another" (p. 54).

The present case study design consists of four sections: (1) Interviews with the Superintendent and principals of all schools; (2) 3 Focus Groups each with teachers, students,

and parents; (3) A telephone survey of approximately 360 residents of the Gesell Local School District randomly chosen from the voter registration records; and (4) Education Management Information System of the State Department of Education and other statistical data for the past several years provided by the district.

Members of the Gesell Local School District were very cooperative and interested in examining issues that may lead to the improvement of existing practices within the district and each school. The attitude of administrators, teachers, board members, parents, and community members is often the single most important factor in schools that continue to grow and strive to improve the quality of learning offered to the children of a school district

Findings and Discussion

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the superintendent and the principals of all schools to understand the administrative point of view within the district. Specifically the level of knowledge, interests, and support for district goals. Further information was garnered about which goals were the focus of the most effort, the methods being used to achieve those goals, and the status of the work. It is acknowledge that not all goals are achievable in a short time span and the progress toward goals is evidence of success. One overriding theme of the administrators appeared to be "What's Best for Kids

One unwritten goal of the district is to improve communications with the community that will hopefully lead to a more cohesive district. Work toward this goal is evident in activities such as the Retreat to take place for the high school community. By including students, parents, community leaders, teachers, and administrators, part of the school staff demonstrates a willingness to directly face their most difficult challenge.

The unique nature of the district has led to conflict and misunderstanding throughout the district. Community members range from commune members, university personnel, tradesmen, welfare recipients, and ultra right wing group members. The diversity of political and social

norms makes for a volatile mix and requires extremely delicate diplomacy when dealing with issues of educational methods.

The new middle school and refurbished high school are good beginnings in the facility areas but as pointed out by both principals, faculty cohesiveness is just as important to provide a good learning environment for children. There is animosity among the different locations that needs to be addressed. For example, two of the villages are at opposite ends of the district and might as well be in different districts for all the contact that exists

Academically the principals demonstrate a positive approach to improving the students learning environment and outcomes. Newsletters and other communications that keep parents informed provide an excellent opportunity for growth in community relations

This attempt to address the lack of community connection is a multi-year effort and requires continuous improvement. The activities discussed by the principals indicate that some of the teachers are actively pursuing new methods of teaching that may lead to overall improvement in student learning. New methods alone will not provide what is needed since there is skepticism in the community over any method not considered traditional. One of greatest difficulties facing the school staff is the social norm of the community. People in this rural area tend to desire that children remain in the area and continue in the same social strata as the parents. In some cases this situation has led to a devaluing of education. That "delicate diplomacy" mentioned earlier is most needed in this arena.

Statistical Data and Analysis

District Data

Since 1987 the average family income for the district rose from $18,373 to $24,735, a 35% increase. Property values per pupil increased as well, moving from $28,612 to $38,363, a 34% increase. Revenues moved from $2,953.45 to $3,849.35 per pupil, a 30 % increase and expenditures per pupil moved from $2,633.60 to $3,887.64, a 47.6% increase. With inflation taken into account, the district has still had positive growth over the years. It is apparent that the pupils in Gesell are in a learning environment where there is less revenue to fulfill greater needs

while there has been an increase in the wealth of the district. This district has not passed a levy or bond issue since the mid 70s. The recurring theme for the lack of support for levies and bond issues has been the poor economic status of the families in the district.

Student Data

Statistical data provides an overview of the status of a district without the additional information given through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Care should be taken to include all manners of information so that a complete picture is provided of the district. The following general image of the district is provided through statistical information.

The number of students has increased by less than 100 students since 1987 with minority student percentages moved from 5.49 to 4.48 during the same time frame. The number of students served by free lunch increased by only 1 percent to 23.15 since 1987. Unfortunately the dropout rate has increased from 2.05 to 5.41% *but that situation may be due to better reporting to the IMS system.* The graduation rate declined from 1987 to 1990 but has recovered since 1991 and is at 73.11% presently.

Attendance has remained stable over the past 10 years for both students and teachers, approximately 94 to 95%. Further the percentage of unauthorized absences is relatively high which presents the School District with an opportunity for improvement. Children miss vital learning when they are not in school. Unfortunately parental attitudes in some instances have proven harmful. Since there is a decline in the support for the value of education, some parents have actively encouraged their children to "not do homework, you won't need that to get a job" or to miss school all together. Once again, the community is in conflict with the schools. In-school suspension and out of school suspensions are within typical ranges across the nation including the bulge in the ninth grade when students enter the high school environment.

The makeup of the Gesell student body includes a number of special needs children: speech handicapped students (101), developmentally handicapped (105), and learning disabled students (89). These areas call for increased awareness and programs to aid the students in

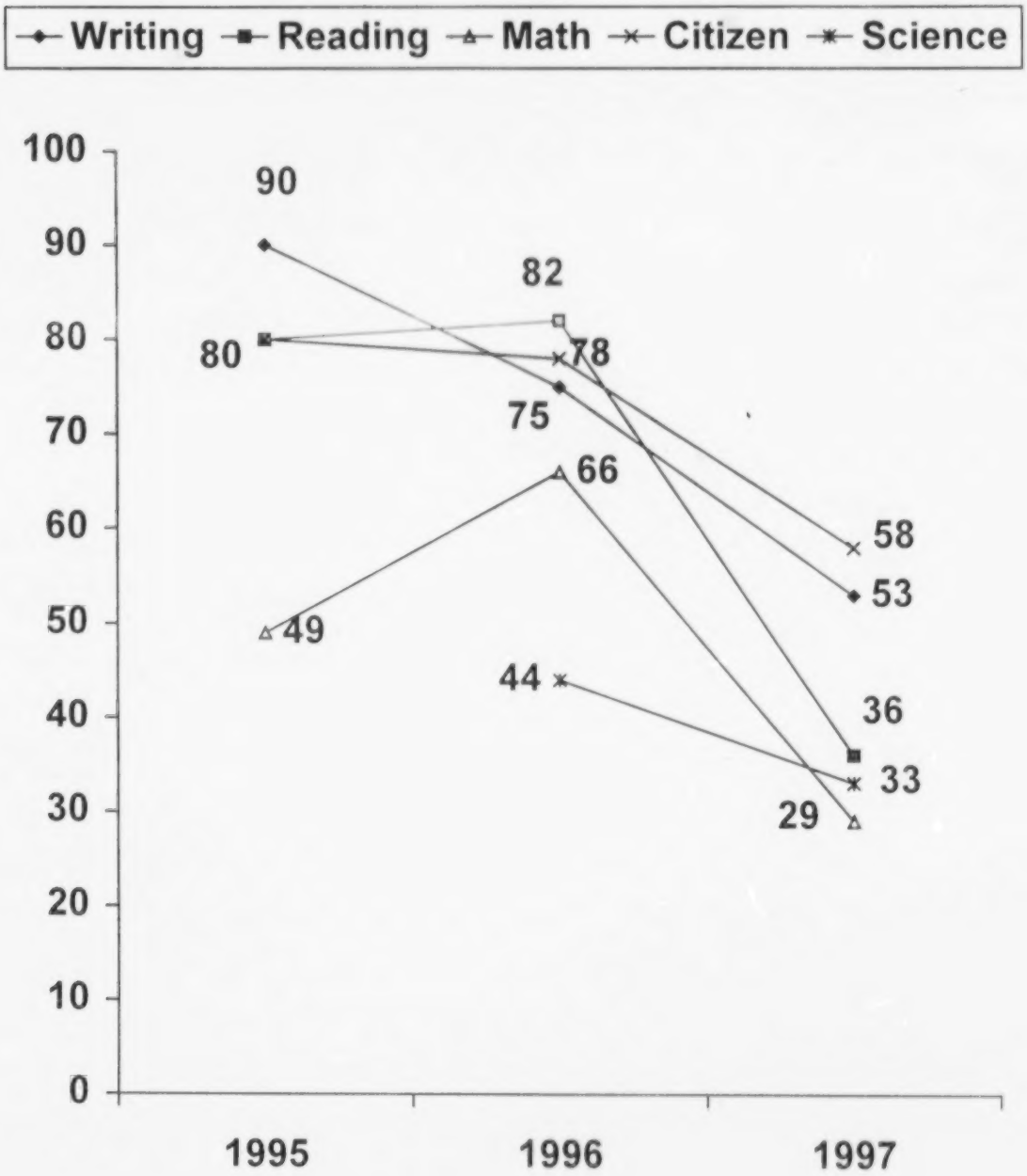
improving their overall situation. This does not refer only to the classroom teacher but to other areas in which School Districts have influence. In a situation of this nature, associated costs are higher than the typical classroom.

Also of interest is that over one third of Gesell students are economically disadvantaged. Programs that are already in place to provide assistance to these students should be continued and expanded to provide greater opportunities for student improvement. Recognition that Gesell has a very diverse economic population is necessary when discussions take place about the financial needs of the schools.

Proficiency Test

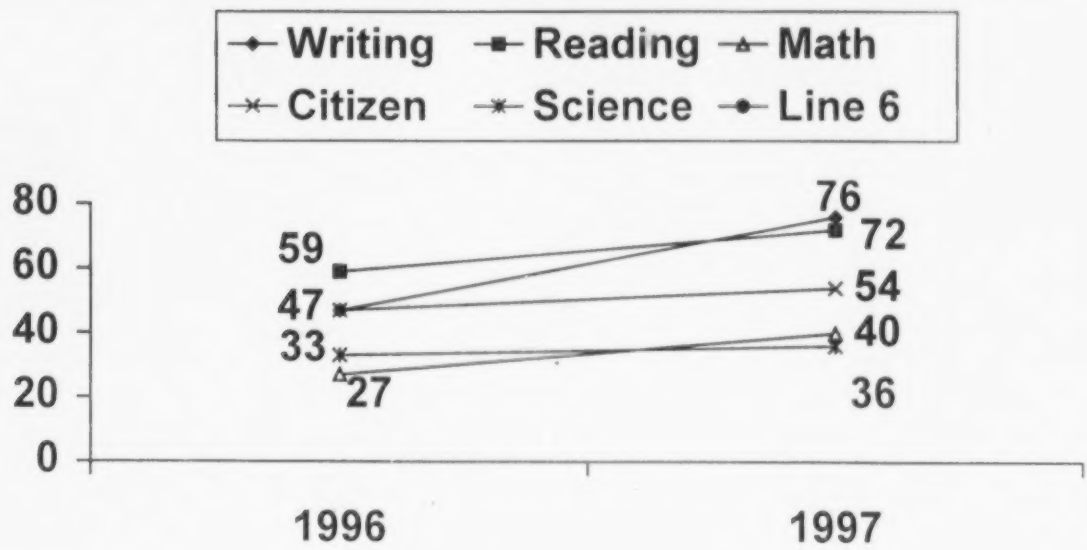
Proficiency test results are the most often quoted measure of a school district's success with educating children. While these results provide information about the students' abilities to take standardized tests; they do not provide other, vital information about how children develop over time in the school environment. Gesell has seen progress in the overall scores since the early 90s. While some scores have fallen in a given year, the overall trend is upward. One exception is the dramatic drop in the 4th grade proficiency scores. A longitudinal examination of proficiency test since 1993 offers another view of performance by the students and teachers of Gesell School District. This information is best-presented in line graph form. No formal longitudinal analysis is performed due to the data format provided by the State Department of Education.

Proficiency Tests Results as of March 1997 for 4th Grade (% passing)



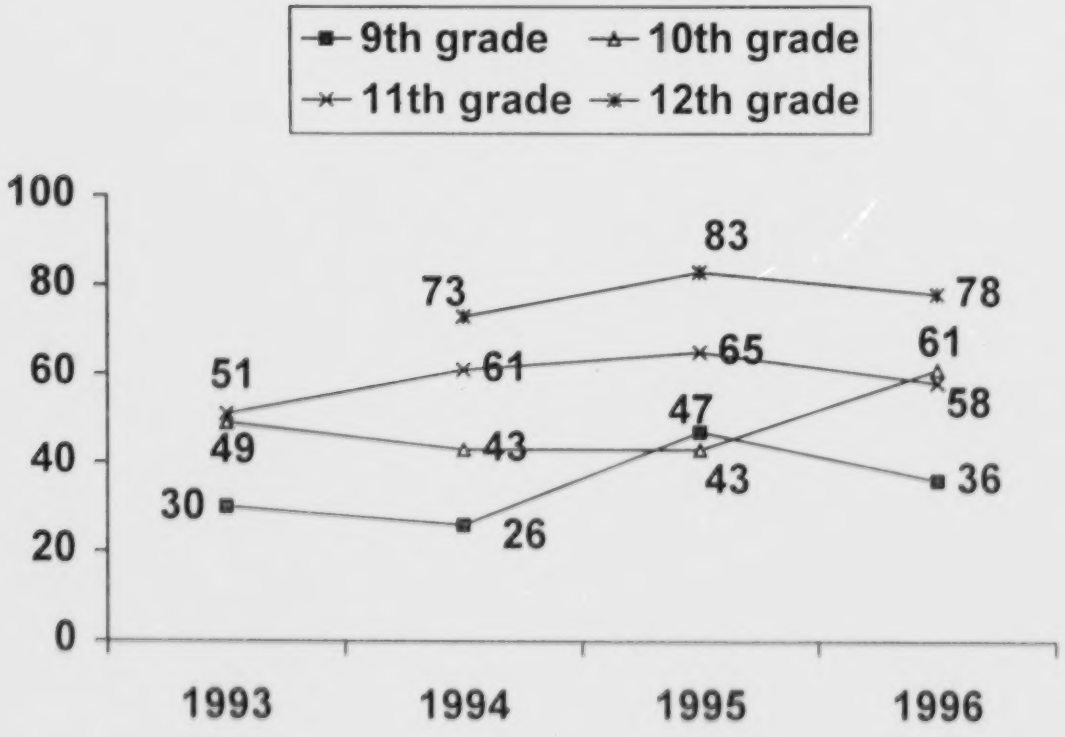
Data provided by the IMS System, February 1998

Proficiency Tests Results as of March 1997 for 6th Grade (% passing)



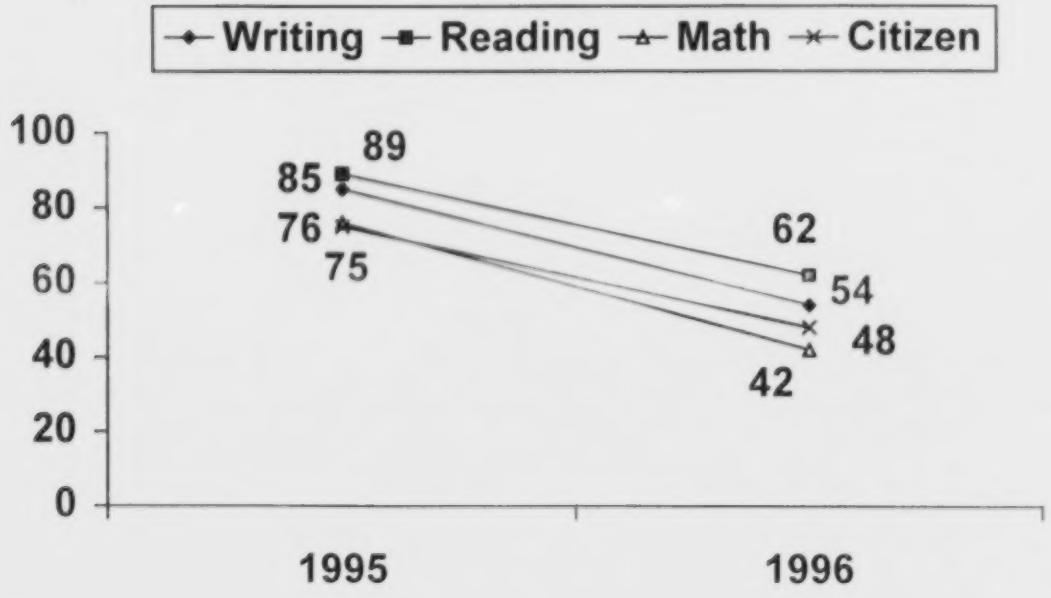
Data Provided by IMS System, February 1998

9th Grade Proficiency Tests Results; Percent Passing Within Each Grade Level



Data Provided by IMS System, February 1998. 1997 data is not Cumulative and is not displayed.

12th Grade Proficiency Tests Results
(% passsing)



Data Provided by IMS System, February 1998.

his data is inconclusive and should only be used as a baseline for future comparisons.

ACT Scores

ACT means scores were provided for 1992-96. Yearly comparisons of the number of students and the average scores establish trends that allow a school district to determine areas needing improvement and areas of strength. The scores have declined over the past 45 years. One reason given for the drop is that all students are now encouraged to take the test while previously only a few took it. At the same time, a large percentage of 11th and 12th graders have moved to the vocational school in the district, leaving college prep students to be the majority in the high school. This would seem to contradict the rationale of greater numbers taking the test.

Gesell ACT Results for 1992-1996

Year	Composite	English	Math	Reading	Science
1992-93	22.6	22.5	22.1	22.6	22.4
1993-94	20.3	20.6	19.0	21.2	20.1
1994-95	20.7	20.4	20.8	20.9	20.3
1995-96	19.0	18.4	18.4	18.9	19.6

Teachers and Staff

Teachers' salaries rose from $22,807 to $30,164 along with years of experience moving from 10.8 years to 11.7 years. The education level of teachers has moved upward as well. The percentage of minority teachers has increased from 1.03 to 4.61. Average salaries are categorized by type of employee and provide an overall picture of the labor costs impact for the district. Interestingly principal salaries are not much higher than teachers are nor is the treasurer. It may be that the counselors and librarian are long time employees as well as the vocational teachers. ***It is imperative for care to be taken when viewing these figures since years of experience plays an active role in deterring the overall salary levels of each group.*** (Figures 14 through 24).

10 Most Similar Districts Comparison

The State Department of Education prepared a special report that compares Gesell Local School District with the 10 most similar districts by size and type. The following table offers comparative information. The type of district relates to the economic conditions of the district such as revenue available and moneys spent per student.

Care should be taken in continual use of these districts, as changes of similar districts will change over time. Also care should be taken in making assumptions of comparative levels. For example, the number of teachers for Gesell is one of the higher numbers yet requirements based on student demographics, state, and federal mandates may require that higher number

Rural/High ADC Districts

Another good marker for comparison is the Rural/High ADC District average. Gesell is part of this division of state school districts according to the State Department of Education. ADC refers to the percentage of children within a school district who receive free and reduced lunch due to family poverty status. Gesell School District ADC is 23.15%. The Rural/High ADC District average is 29.26%. It is interesting to note that the average number of teachers for this division is higher than Gesell. Obviously, Gesell employs an average number of teachers when these two comparison groups are considered. Once again individual district requirements may call for high numbers due to student needs.

1996 Data for Gesell and 10 Comparative Districts

District	96 ADM	General Fund Cost Per Pupil	Per Pupil Valuation	Number of Teachers
1	1,621.5	3,971	43,612	71.00
2	1,605.6	3,757	36,953	55.00
3	1,598.6	4,165	45,216	63.21
4	1,608.4	4,197	51,141	64.00
5	1,628.3	3,960	58,352	64.98
6	1,639.2	4,220	70,110	72.66
7	1,597.0	3,933	43,933	55.00
8	1,633.2	3,955	52,258	61.74
9	1,602.5	4,296	67,632	68.50
10	1,610.6	4,115	80,163	69.05
Gesell 1,654	3,888		49,605	72.56
Rural/High ADC	1,551	3,933	43,926	77.99

Focus Groups

Focus groups were held with parents, teachers, and students as to the performance of the district. The focus groups were composed of parents from a variety of backgrounds including socio-economic status, student's academic performance, student discipline, and age/grade level. An explanation of the topics discussed and process used are provided next. This information is provided for the parents of the high school students only as a complete documentation would make this report over 100 hundred pages. Analysis and conclusions about these discussions will appear in the conclusion section.

High School Parents Comments:

Fourteen parents participated in the focus group for the high school. Parents were pro-school and involved in their children's education. Most held conservative values and tradition plays a strong role in family life. The parents were very proud of the school facilities and appeared to value their children's school.

Responses to Questions

1. *One thing that I really like about this school district is*

Key Points that Parents made	Quotes
#1 small, open, academic focus, #2 new facilities, size of district #3 rural, less crime/drugs, close relationship with teachers, block scheduling	**"Know most of the kids and most of the parents too."** "Hands on projects help kids get more involved **with their studies."** **Teachers have "done great things with the resources they have."** **"You know the teachers . . .they're your neighbors."**

2. *What are the most important things that your child should receive from school?*

Key-Points that Parents Made	Quotes
time, safe environment, good curriculum qualified teachers, basics in early grades, curriculum caring, safe, clean, positive, creative, consistent, good curriculum	

3. *What are the most important things that a child should receive from their family in order to do well in school?*

Key Points	Quotes
#1 support/encouragement, time, roots, optimism, interest in what they're doing #2 attention, support, active role in schoolwork #3 encouragement, values, involvement	**"Give support and sometimes a little push."** **"Don't leave entire responsibility up to the state."**

4. *What level of performance do you think children should reach?*

Key Points	Quotes
#1 A's, B's realistically #2 their own best #3 high standards, but individualized for each child.	**"You're only going to get from a child what you expect."** **"I want the mark to be set high. . .the world expects a lot."** **"Expect the best performance they're capable of doing."**

5. *What is the purpose of homework?*

Key Points	Quotes
#1 gives parents idea of what child is doing, retention, responsibility, organizational study skills #2 responsibility, reinforcement, #3 needs to be a balance, measurement tool,	"It's good as long as it's relevant." **"What's been learned during the day doesn't sink in until you sit down and look at it."**

6. *Do you think it works in your child's school?*

Key Points	Quotes
#1 gets in way of extracurricular activities, amount is too much, #2 family life has a lot to do with it #3 projects are good	**"I wondered if teachers were in competition to assign the most homework."** **"Hands on work sinks in much deeper."**

7. *How should student achievement be demonstrated/measured?*

Key Points	Quotes
#1 creative testing, dropout rate, career plan, children reaching goals #2 grades/grade cards, individual level #3 portfolios, student involvement	**"Creative testing to give them all a chance."** **"We have to fit in with what already exists . . .all you here is class rank and GPA."** **"Standardized tests don't measure a students capabilities."** **"There's more to life than sticking a nose in a book."**

8 *Who should set the standard for achievement?*

Key Points	Quotes
#1 not the state, teachers, parents, principals, a committee #2 local standards #3 parents and school	**"Can't have different standards than the rest of the world in which they're functioning."** **"Students should feel good about their abilities and potential to go on."**

9. *What do you think of proficiency tests?*

Key Points	Quotes
#1 too much emphasis, causes stress, tells you nothing about child, not geared towards rural kids #2 fairness issues, who determines what you should know, #3 could determine problem with teaching, somebody has to set standards, too much emphasis.	**"I think the kids are tested to death."** **"If scores are low, it is seen as a reflection on schools and teachers."** **"Country kids are different."**

10. ***Should a child be passed to the next grade so that they can stay with their age group, even if they are not ready academically? (Called "social promotion")***

Key Points	Quotes
#1 individual cases, #2 remedial classes, hard for everyone, #3 No, self-esteem shouldn't be carried that far.	**"There's a point where to be held back destroys them."** **"I don't think it benefits the students at all."** **"Seen it happen too many times."**

11. Who is responsible for the quality of education that children receive in this school district?

Key Points	Quotes
#1 parents, teachers, administrators, child #2 parents, school board, administrators, #3 Board of Education, parents, administrators, teachers	**"Teacher's responsibility is to teach our children; parent's responsibility is to get involved in parent-teacher relationships."** **"It's a package deal from the top to the bottom."**

12. In terms of the responsibility of the school system, how should this school district decide whether or not it is meeting it's responsibility for providing a quality education?

Key Points	Quotes
#1 ultimate success of past students, teacher proficiency tests, % of where students are headed when they leave school #2 compare with other school districts, know how group did as whole and compare child, teacher evaluations #3 polling graduated students, comparable school districts, need equal funding	

13. If the school district is not meeting its responsibility, what actions should be taken? By whom?

Key Points	Quotes
#1 parents should bring in solutions with problems, #2 parents should become active #3 action by the state, take problem in order of rank,	**"Any worthwhile teacher will listen to your concern."** **"Start with the parents. They are the best ones to evaluate if their children are successful."**

14. If you could change one thing (anything) that would most improve the performance of students in this school district, what would that one thing be?

Key Points	Quotes
#1 unity of students, parent involvement, funding, resources, #2 go back to basics, education at home, funding, stability with curriculum, tired of constant change #3 textbooks, more choices at high school level, technology, MONEY, parental involvement	**"You can tell a child that has a family who pushes education."** **"Teachers are trying to make school too fun."**

District Wide Survey

A twenty four-question survey was conducted with over 380 community members in the Gesell School District. Information gathered pertains to the overall school environment, academic conditions, management of the district, and community involvement with the School District. Voter registration lists were used to generate the sample of community members. The survey was conducted in December 1997 and January 1998. Since not all community members have telephones, an attempt at personal contact was also part of the strategy. A copy of the survey is provided in the appendix.

Three of the questions are demographic information which establishes that the people are members of the Gesell School District while the other 21 deal with information that can be used to establish consistency of opinion about the Gesell School District. Questions are categorized as district management, academic/school, or community relations.

Community members could respond in one of six ways. 1= strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=disagree; 4=strongly disagree; 5=no answer; and 9=no response. Frequency of response in each category was used to develop an understanding of how these community members perceived the School District in a variety of ways.

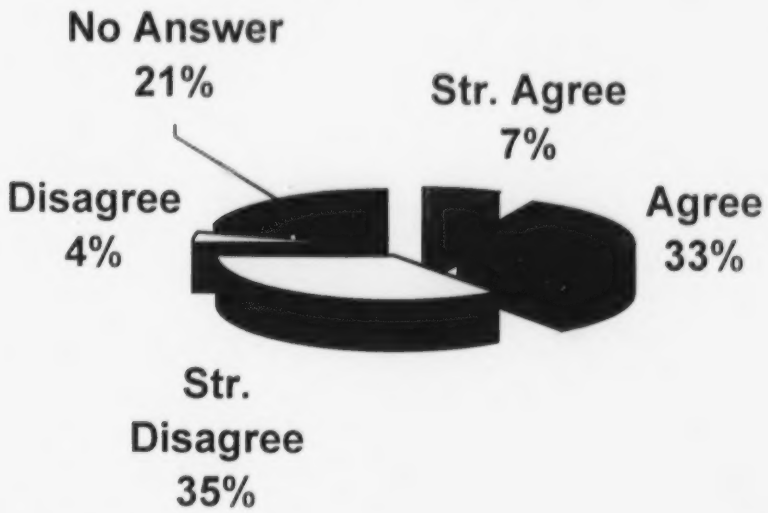
Survey Results

Community members surveyed were 35% males and 65% female with the largest number of participants being between 40 and 49 years of age. Over 40% of those responding have students currently in the schools, mostly in elementary and middle school.

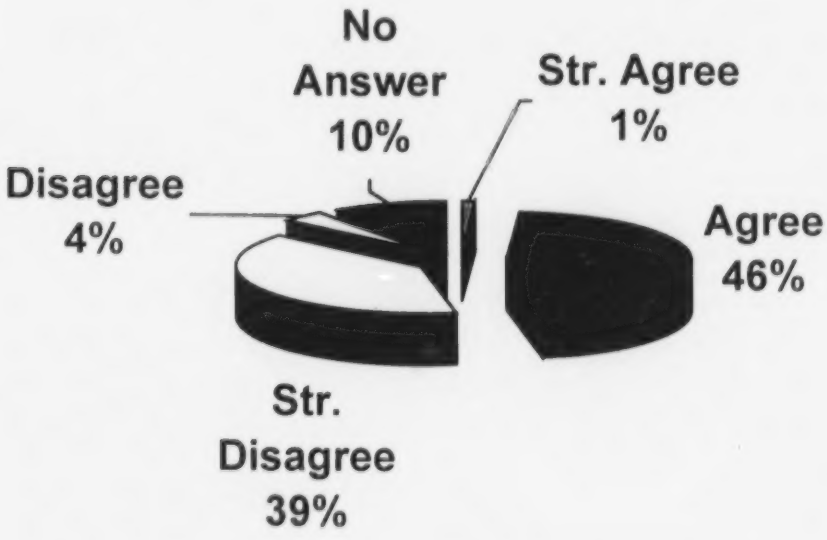
Questions dealing with district management indicate that there is a fairly even split between agree and disagree with agree having slightly more responses. Areas of deep division exist when the question of consolidation is brought up; 60 % believe consolidation has been good for the district while 40% believe it has been bad. This may be the core of the problems that Gesell School District has been struggling with over the past few decades. Pie charts are provided concerning other areas of concern.

Survey Graphs

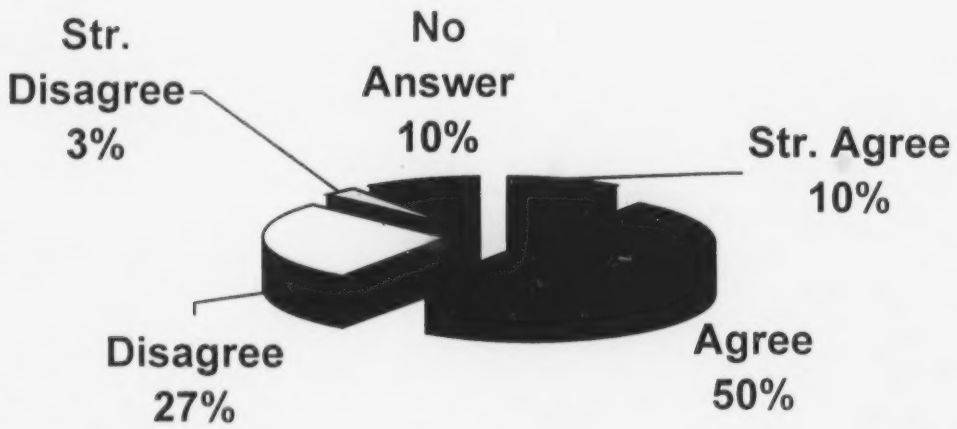
School District Consolidation has not been Good for Our Schools



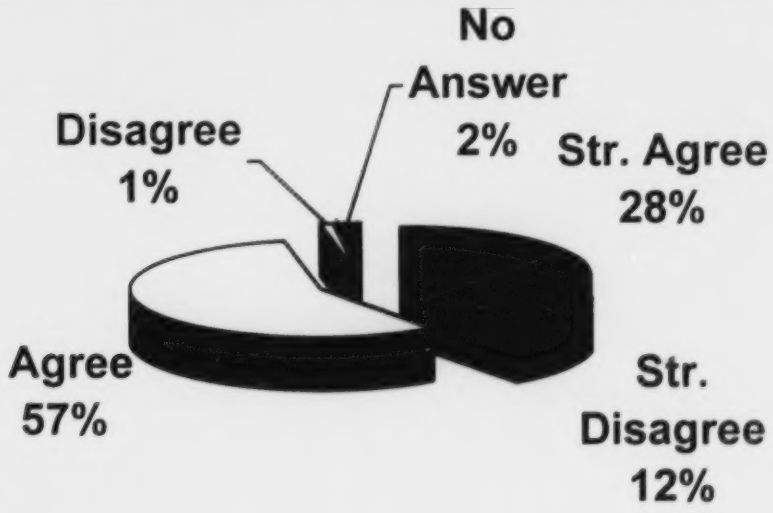
The Schools and the Local Community Share Many of the Same Attitudes about Education



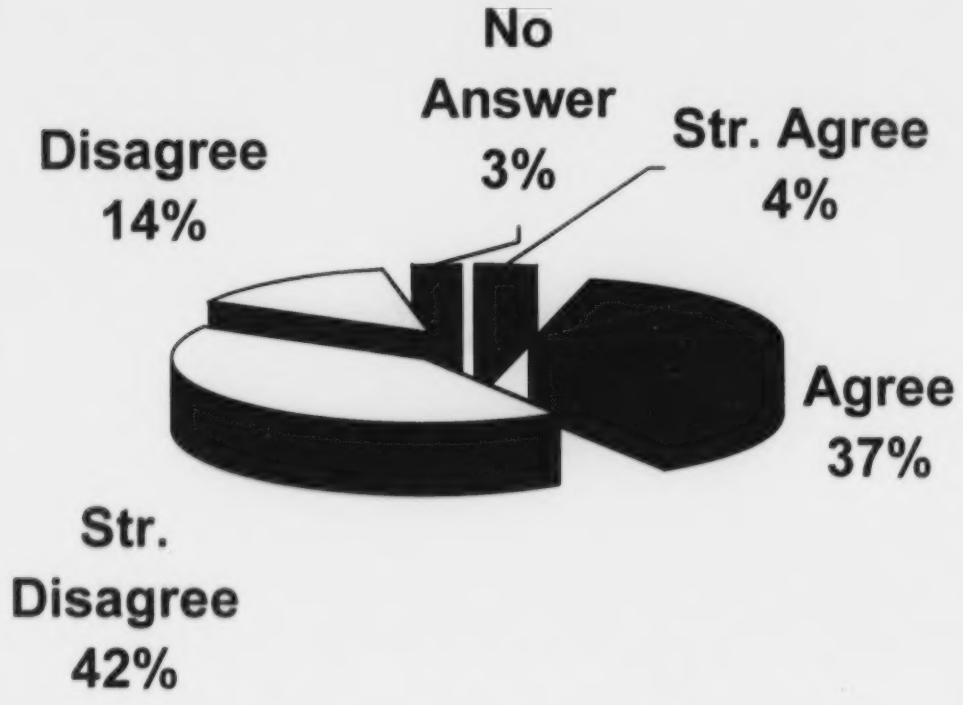
The Traditional Ways of Teaching are Best



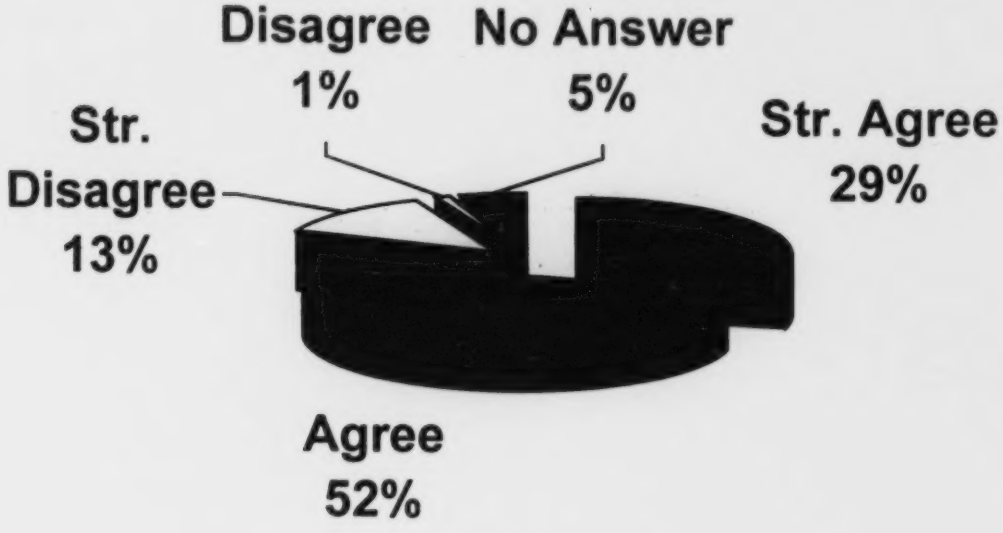
Newer Textbooks would Improve the Education of Our Students



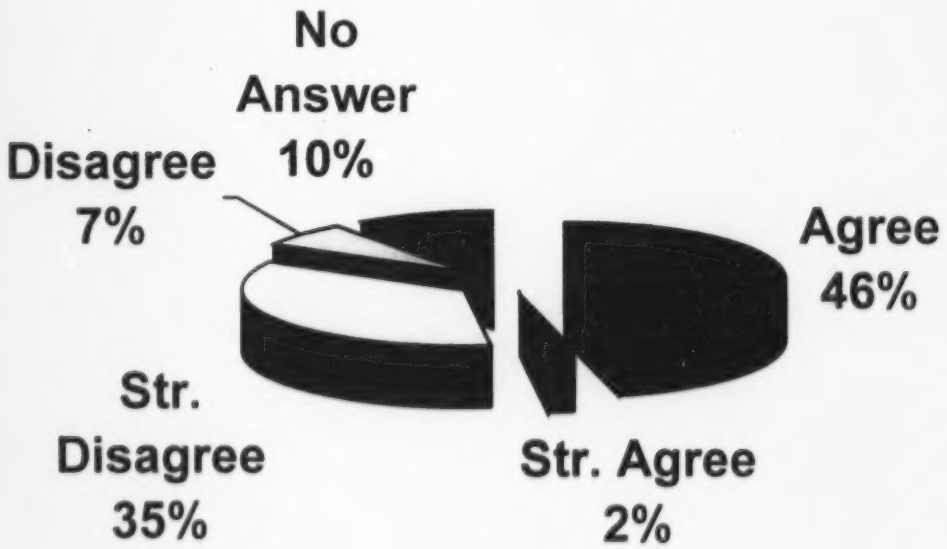
Proficiency Tests are the Most Important Measure of Success for Schools and Students



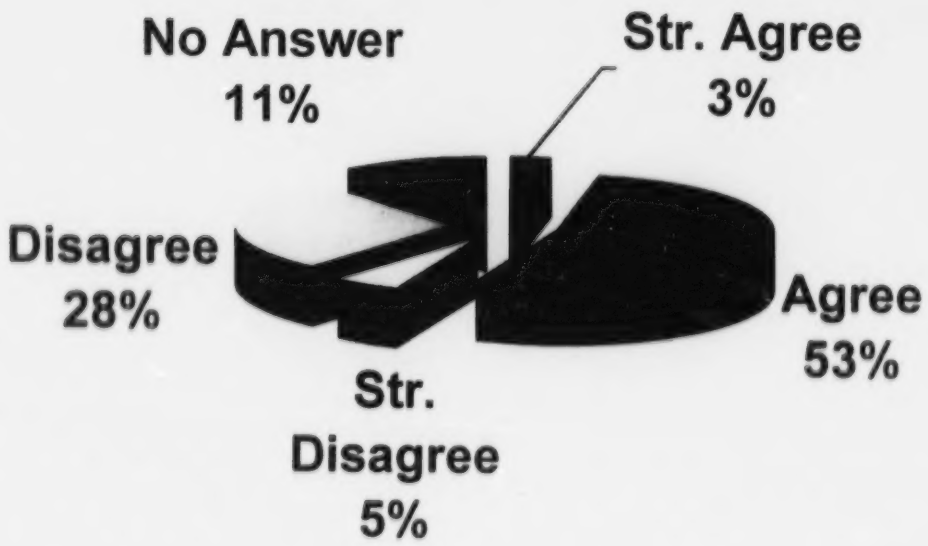
The School District Needs More Technology, like Computers



The School Board Fairly Represents the Wishes of the Voters in the School District



The School Board and Administration are doing a Good Job Managing the Schools



There was general agreement that the district was administered well, that technology needed to be improved and that new textbooks were needed. A division existed about community wishes being honored by the school board and the alternative teaching and scheduling methods at the high school. Also noted was the continuation of the division about the benefits of the consolidation although it took place three decades ago.

Conclusions

The district is an artificially created community that is gesellschaft in nature. It may be that most times when communities are required or forced to consolidate that the separate communities will remain intact. This occurrence does not bode well for schools in those artificial communities. The constant strife interferes with change, improvement, financial needs, and community/school relationships. By being aware of the nature of consolidated districts, school leaders can plan counter-measures to account for the divisions that exist,

Gesell is attempting to provide a good learning environment for the children while community members maintain the outdated opinion that the district is too poor to finance a better environment. Only by correcting this notion will true improvement be available. The challenge facing the entire Gesell School District is enormous and when viewed in entirety impossible. The tasks needed to provide sustained improvement for the children should be approached in a step by step fashion rather than all at once. Care should be taken that "planning committee" do not become an end in itself rather just the first step in the road to success for children's future.

My overall conclusions are that student achievement has a positive overall outlook except for the 4t^{h} grade proficiency tests; that instructional leadership by the principals is traditional except at the high school where a more democratic governance is in place; that instructional practice moves between traditional and alternative/new methods with mixed success; and that the

learning environment has been damaged by the divisive environment of the district. In the foreseeable future continuing community strife will impact the learning environment in a negative manner, destabilizing attempts to improve student learning. Community strife can influence behavior and performance of students. Students are very aware of parental and community attitudes and that awareness impacts student behavior and performance.

- The political contention over the past few years has drained much of the "learning energy" from administrators, teachers, students, and parents.
- Gesell is a small, rural school district facing financial troubles in the next few years unless steps are taken locally as well as statewide to remedy the situation. The Gesell community bases many opinions about what the district is financially capable of on past levels of family income and property value yet the situation has changed.
- This district is divided among the different geographic locations and the situation has provided a massive schism in the schools. Teachers and administrators do not feel cohesive and misunderstandings are the results.
- Teachers do not feel they are a part of the district decision making process; that they need to have more input into financial decisions; and that new and better textbooks, materials and supplies are needed. Teachers do not feel valued by the district or community
- Community members believe that there is a lack of communication, not only with them, but also among the employees of the district.
- There is great division of opinion as to the effectiveness of new teaching methods; traditional methods are valued by a large number of community members.

What needs to be done to move to a gemeinschaft community and improve the learning environment for the children of Gesell Local School District?

- The School District and the community must break down the walls that have caused such deep dissension in the district. This dissension has caused great harm to the learning environment for all concerned
- The School Board, administrators, and teachers must build trust among themselves before they can build trust with the community
- Gesell School District must reassess given norms about what the community can afford to pay for their children's education. With the worsening financial crisis (that the state is not handling in a timely manner), local districts are going to have to make difficult choices.

References

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School Performance Survey **Form ID No**_____

1. First let me confirm what school district you live in. A___Alex. Local B___Federal Hocking C___Trimble Local

"Now I am going to read you a series of statements. After each one is read, I would like you to tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with that statement."

2. The school board and the administration are doing a good job managing the schools.
A___Strongly Agree B___Agree C___Disagree D___Strongly Disagree E___No Answer

3. **The school board and the administration are doing a good job managing the school district budget..**
A___Strongly Agree B___Agree C___Disagree D___Strongly Disagree E___No Answer

4. The school board fairly represents the wishes of the voters in the school district.
A___Strongly Agree B___Agree C___Disagree D___Strongly Disagree E___No Answer

5. **The teachers in our schools are doing a good job of preparing students for the proficiency tests.**
A___Strongly Agree B___Agree C___Disagree D___Strongly disagree E___No Answer

6. Proficiency tests are the most important way to measure success of schools and students.
A___Strongly Agree B___Agree C___Disagree D___Strongly disagree E___No Answer

7. The school district needs to bring more technology, like computers, into the schools
A___Strongly Agree B___Agree C___Disagree D___Strongly disagree E___No Answer

8. **Newer textbooks would improve the education of our students.**
A___Strongly Agree B___Agree C___Disagree D___Strongly disagree E___No Answer

9. **Smaller class size and fewer children in the building makes for a better learning environment for children.**
A___Strongly Agree B___Agree C___Disagree D___Strongly disagree E___No Answer

10. School district consolidation has not been good for the schools in our district. **(Ask for Federal Hocking and Alexander Local districts only. If Trimble Local district, mark E)**
A___Strongly Agree B___Agree C___Disagree D___Strongly disagree E___No Answer

11. The traditional ways of teaching are best.
A___Strongly Agree B___Agree C___Disagree D___Strongly disagree E___No Answer

12. **It is all right to try new ways of scheduling classes in the high school.**
A___Strongly Agree B___Agree C___Disagree D___Strongly disagree E___No Answer

13. **Parents play a large enough role in schools and should not be asked to do more.**
A___Strongly Agree B___Agree C___Disagree D___Strongly disagree E___No Answer

14. **The school board, superintendent, principals, and teachers work well together in our school district.**
A___Strongly Agree B___Agree C___Disagree D___Strongly disagree E___No Answer

15. **The schools and the local community share many of the same attitudes about schools and education.**
A___Strongly Agree B___Agree C___Disagree D___Strongly disagree E___No Answer

16. What is your level of interest in the _____ school district?
A___Lots of Interest B___Some Interest C___Little Interest D___No Interest E___No Answer

"In order to compare your answers to others that we are receiving I am going to ask you a few questions about your household."

17. Do you have children currently attending school in _____**(respondent's district)** ? A___Yes B___No

18-21. If your children currently attend school in the district, what school(s) do they attend? ***(If #18= no, record all as E=no answer)***
18A___Elementary 19A___Middle School 20A___Jr High**(Ask Alex. only)** 21A___High School

22. Please tell me where your age falls in the age ranges I am about to read to you.
A___18-29 B___30-39 C___40-49 D___50-59 E___60 or older

23. What is your zip code? _____ **(Record at Special Codes Section rows k-l)**
24. What is your sex? A___Female B___Male**(Record at "Sex" on bubble sheet)**

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer our questions. The information you have provided will be very helpful to the distr in planning for the future.

PARENT QUESTIONS

General Opening Question

1. One thing that I really like about this school district is _____.

Performance-Related Questions

2. What are the most important things that your child should receive from school?

3. What is most important for students to learn and do well in school?

4. What level of performance do you think children should reach, i.e. should the majority of children be getting all A's and B's, are C's OK?

5. What is the purpose of homework?

6. How should student achievement be demonstrated/measured?

7. What do you think of proficiency tests?

8. Should a child be passed to the next grade so that they can stay with their age group, even if they are not ready academically?

9. Who is responsible for the quality of education that children receive in this school district?

10. In terms of the responsibility of the school system (OR TEACHER?), how should this school district decide whether or not it is meeting it's responsibility for providing a quality education?

11. If the school district (OR TEACHER?) is not meeting its responsibility, what actions should be taken?

12. If you could change one thing (anything) that would most improve the performance of students in this school district, what would that one thing be?

STUDENT QUESTIONS

General Opening Question

1. One thing that I really like about this school district is _____.

Performance-Related Questions

2. What are the most important things that you should be getting from school? OR What are some parts of a school do you consider important to a good education?

3. Think back. What grade did you learn the most in and why?

4. Overall, what do you think about the education that you are getting in this district? (SHOULD WE HAVE THIS QUESTION/SHOULD WE HAVE IT IN THE OTHER TWO SETS--WHERE SHOULD IT BE??)

5. How should the school measure or decide how well you are doing?

6. What is the purpose of homework?

7. What do you think of proficiency tests?

8. Who is responsible for the quality of education that you receive in this school district?

9. In terms of the responsibility of the school system (OR TEACHER?), how should this school district decide whether or not it is meeting it's responsibility for providing you a good education?

10.. If the school district (OR TEACHER?) is not meeting its responsibility, what should be done?

11. If you could change one thing (anything) that would most improve the (education --USED "PERFORMANCE" IN THE OTHER TWO SETS) of students in this school district, what would that one thing be and why?

TEACHER QUESTIONS

General Opening Question

1. One thing that I really like about this school district is _____.

Performance-Related Questions

2. What is most important in order for students to learn and do well in school?

3. Are you aware of the curriculum flow/scope and sequence--what you are supposed to be teaching as opposed to what students should have learned last year or should learn next year?

4. What resources, i.e. textbooks, lab materials, etc. do you need to do your job?

5. Do you feel that you are adequately informed and aware of your specific responsibilities as classroom teachers regarding performance standards, i.e. what your students should be achieving?

6. How should student achievement be demonstrated/measured?

7. What do you think of proficiency tests?

8. Should a child be passed to the next grade so that they can stay with their age group, even if they are not ready academically? (social promotion)

9. Who is responsible for the quality of education that children receive in this school district?

10. In terms of the responsibility of the school system, how should this school district decide whether or not it is meeting it's responsibility for providing a quality education?

11. If the school district is not meeting its responsibility, what actions should be taken?

12. If you could change one thing (anything) that would most improve the performance of your students, what would that one thing be?